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ABSTRACT

A discipline code developed by the staff at the National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the schools is outlined. Development of the code was preceded by a survey of teachers and administrators on their perceptions of pressing discipline issues. The issues selected from the survey were resubmitted to the teachers and administrators for rating, then the data were reanalyzed and refined. A codebook of offenses and discipline procedures was developed from this, and a pilot study was conducted in a junior high school for students with behavioral problems. The codebook is developed so teachers can quickly and accurately quantify rule violations. It lists seven major violation categories with attached descriptors for detailing offenses and a list of possible consequences. A codesheet is keyed to the codebook for teacher use. The codebook was further developed as a computer program for the Apple II. It is "user friendly" and works on a "menu format" with a security routine installed for confidentiality. After a trial period the computer program has been updated. This program has many possibilities for use in future research and teacher improvement as it makes discipline records instantaneously available. It also has the potential for misuse, and caution must be exercised to avoid using the data as an excuse to increase punitiveness toward students. A 9-item reference list is included along with three appendixes with examples of the program. (MD)

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The Development of a School Wide Computerized Uniform Discipline Reporting System[1]

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[1] Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Philadelphia, April 20, 1984.

[2] The writers are indebted to the staff of Trenton, New Jersey Schools who helped develop the system. Special Thanks go to Tony Dilemme, Carol Hill, Michael Rothstein, Dorothy Le Fredo and Calvin Taylor.

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The Annual Gallup Polls on the Public's Attitude Toward Education have, since 1969, have consistently highlighted the public's concern with discipline (Gallup, 1983). Among the many proposed approaches to dealing with this issue has been the development of models for improving discipline reporting procedures. Within the last five to ten years, increasing numbers of schools have developed parent and students handbooks, pamphlets, or outlines regarding student conduct. A relatively recent movement has grown for schools to devise detailed discipline codes which spell out infractions and their respective consequences. Eighty-seven percent of the schools responding to a survey in New Jersey (Lally, 1982) endorsed the use of a formal document stating behavior regulations for students. Many states have strongly urged or legislated that local districts develop discipline codes, especially at the high school level (Stagliano & Hyman, 1983).

Despite the proliferation of discipline codes and the documents suggesting their usefulness, a review of the literature revealed no systematic studies which clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of codes in reducing discipline problems. Further, little has been done to identify important factors which might contribute to the proper development and maintenance of useful codes. Theory and research in organizations suggest that there are certain ecological factors that relate to effective rule enforcement (Katz & Kahn, 1966). One factor identified is the existence of a sense of cohesiveness and legitimacy that is accepted in terms of general norms of

acceptable behavior (Bidwell, 1970). Clarity and consistency of rules (Bayh, 1977; Duke, 1980; Wynne, 1980) have also been highlighted as factors to be considered. Lally (1982) attempted to develop a data base to begin to systematically evaluate the nature and worth of this approach to solving problems of school misbehavior. This study explored school organizational factors and how they relate to the developement and maintenance of codes which are considered effective by the administrators who enforce the codes. Results suggested that consistency on the part of school staff in responding to discipline infractions was positively correlated to reductions in student misbehavior.

Since it seems likely that school officials will continue to support the use of discipline codes, further investigation of their real usefulness is needed. Among the critical areas in need of consideration are students' impressions of staff cohesiveness or fragmentation, and the students' experience of the consistency of application of school conduct norms. Also, staff perceptions, involvement, commitment to school policy and consistency in carrying out discipline procedures must be assessed. Social scientists might consider the sense of psychological support teachers could derive from the security, certainty and tangibility of a formal, written, public school policy.

In order to address these issues, the staff at the National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in the schools began a long term organizational development project in Trenton, New Jersey (Pokalo, Hyman, & Moore 1983). Preliminary work included surveying teachers and administrators

throughout the entire district on there perceptions of pressing issues in discipline. Highlighted in the analysis of this survey was the staff's need for an accurate and easily obtainable data base in order to make decisions concerning school discipline programs. An item analysis was also performed on the survey and those issues ranking as most substantial were selected for further development. Once the problem identification phase was completed, attempts were made to define these rule infractions in a more objective manner. These definitions were then resubmitted to the teachers and administrators for comment. Each item was rated based on the perceived importance of the specified infraction, the level of seriousness of the stated offense, and the clarity with which the item had been stated. This data was again analyzed and refined. From this sample pool of items, teacher and Center representitives developed a structural codebook of offenses and discipline procedures. A pilot study was performed in a self contained junior high school for adolescents who have demonstrated a history of behavioral maladjustment.

The codebook was developed in such a manner as to allow teachers to quickly and accurately quantify rules violations. Seven major categories of violations were listed, each with an array of attached descriptors which could supply specific details about the offense. For example, one major category was "fighting among students" (Appendix A). A specific descriptor list was attached to this major code which included among others, hitting, kicking, verbally threatening, and taunting. Since it was seen

that some elements of the offenses were redundent, generic descriptor lists were developed to identify such information as offense location, victim, gang involvement, and weapon use, among others. These generic lists could be used in conjunction with many of the major codes. For example, rather than using "fighting among students in the hallway" and "fighting among students in the classroom" as two seperate major codes, "fighting among students" was set up as a major code, while "hallway" and "classroom" appeared as elements on the list of possible offense locations. Each of these lists were incorporated into the codebook in a checklist fashion so that the teacher could easily find and code the information.

In addition to describing the infraction, lists of possible consequences were developed. The teacher could list actions taken directly following the incident and those recommneded to occur in the near future. Thus, data could be gathered on the efficacy of given consequences for specific actions.

Finally, a coding sheet was keyed to the codebook. Precautions were taken in its design to reduce the possibility of mismarking the sheet. An area was reserved for additional comments and explanations. Once the teacher is familiar with the codebook and codesheet it takes approximately one minute to complete the necessary infomation. The codesheet is then turned in for processing.

The next step in the project was the development of a BASIC program written for an Apple][microcomputer which could process the data. The program was designed with "user friendliness" in mind and worked on a "menu format". Due to the confidential

nature of the data, and the possibilities for its misuse, a security routine was installed in the program. In a procedure similar to that seen in automated teller machines, a unique code must be entered before the operator is allowed to gain access to the system. Once this is successfully done, the master menu appears and the system is functional.

It was decided that one helpful and time saving capability would be for the program to generate anecdotal reports about a given incident. While the teacher is only required to enter several numbers on the codesheet, these numbers are read and interpreted by the program and translated into a narrative description of the incident. The program includes a host of phrase strings keyed to the specific code numbers of the offenses. Grammatical logic is included in the program so that these reports can be written in clear, Standard English (Appendix B). A utility is included making it possible to print a daily report of all information with a single command. This allows the administration to send copies to all teachers who submit coded infraction sheets within a very short time period for confirmation.

In addition to the anecdotal report subprogram, a set of subroutines was developed which allow the user to review and edit any information stored on the data files. Thus, if a teacher reports, after receiving the anecdotal turnaround, that a mistake had been made, it is a simple procedure to correct it directly on the data storage disk. Corrected anecdotal reports can be filed in the student's record, and copies sent

home to the parents.

In order to review the statistical properties of the data, a set of subroutines was developed which computed the frequencies and percentages of given variables. This was done in such a manner, that any single variable or combination of variables can be selected for processing. For example, a researcher can ask for the number of assaults on teachers involving weapons, or the number of total offenses committed by a particular student. The printout includes the frequencies and percentages for the specified information and then gives breakdowns across major offense and consequence categories (Appendix C).

One other feature of the system is the ability to make copies of specified records onto an auxilliary storage disk. For example, the specifiaction code for truency can be used to create a disk comprised of all records containing truency offenses. This enables the school to use the system to track attendence problems as a seperate discipline issue.

After an inital trial period, the program was updated to better meet the needs of the project. It was found that despite several years of development in the abstract, the in vivo application of the program generated a host of new questions. A number of the descriptors were further operationalized. One full category was added to the actions section which describes any actions that actually occur beyond those immediately recommended. This enables the school to study longer term intervention effectiveness. Some of the ambiguities which crept into the wording of certain items were also removed. Finally, the running speed for the program was reduced by 65%.

The system has been in use for about seven weeks in its latest updated revision. A brief analysis of some of the data shows that many of the reported offenses are occuring in clusters. Almost one-third of all reported offenses have at least two major rules violations attached to them. One other preliminary piece of information is that teachers tend to use a combination of discipline procedures for a single offense. By contrast, administrators typically choose one single form of discipline per offense.

Exploratory meetings were held with school staff and the teachers responsible for data collection, and several issues were discussed. As a good deal of variability was seen among teachers in the types of offenses reported, questions were raised regarding the sources of the variance. It was also noted that teachers who had been involved in an ongoing self improvement model (Pokalo, Hyman & Moore, 1983) had a slightly lower rate of discipline referrals than those who were not involved. One staff member suggested that periodic statistics should be offered to teachers so that they could compare themselves with the average for number and type of referrals. A number of suggestions were offered regarding the use of the data to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention efforts.

While it is clear that the system will have to undergo a number of changes before becoming fully operational, the possibilities for using it for future research and teacher improvement are enormous. Schoolwide discipline records will be in a form in which information is instantaneously accessible

about particular students, teachers, and rule violations. Researchers will be able to keep track of offense-consequence pairings for particular schools and teachers. High risk locations and time periods can be identified in order to take preventitive measures.

The use of systematic, easily retrievable data has the potential to place a lot of information in the hands of others in a relatively short amount of time. Despite its positive aspects, the potential for misuse raises a number of concerns. One of the most attractive features of the system is its ability to use behavioral descriptors to identify children who are in need of special attention and programs. However, as is the case with test results, misuse of the data can result in disproportionate representation of demographic groups in special programming. Further, caution must be exercised to avoid using the data as an excuse for an increase in punitiveness towards students. In a similar vein, while teachers can be benefitted by the monitoring of their discipline procedures, there is potential for the data to be used to scapegoat rather than help them. Instead of giving teachers feedback on the efficacy of their present discipline procedures and offering them the opportunity to develop better ones, teachers reporting too many incidents could be rated as ineffective. Fears of reporting incidents could result in even greater discipline problems.

The modular nature of the system makes it extremely flexible in the ways it can be modified to meet the needs of particular schools and districts. Meichenbaum (personal communication, April 6, 1984) has suggested possibilities for its use in

training parents to become more aware of their discipline strategies. While its present form reflects the way in which discipline issues have been identified in this particular demonstration project, other conceptual models can be incorporated into the data gathering process. For example, questions can be included to yield information relating to why teachers felt that a given offense was deemed punishable at a particular time. It can also be modified to be used as an observational system for classroom behavior.

The actual causes of student misbehavior continue to be debated. It would appear that gathering information on the subject is the most effective means to developing increasingly integrated theories of school conduct. The system as presented here represents one attempt at maintaining this approach. However, it would be unfair to the issue to oversimplify the components. Simply distributing printed copies of a school discipline code, and tracking offenses may be an inefficient means of promoting positive school behavior, regardless of the level of sophistication used in carrying out this procedure. While school rules may need to be incorporated into the curriculum in order to insure student familiarity with school regulations, there is no real behavioral evidence that they are actually effective when not combined with other measures. We expect that the system which we are developing will provide an excellent format for the evaluation of the effectiveness of discipline codes and a variety of approaches to improve teaching.

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OFFENSE CODE 05 FIGHTING BETWEEN STUDENTS

OFFENSE DETAILS:
- 01 Hitting, punching, or kicking
- 02 Making verbal or gestural threats
- 03 Verbal taunting
- 04 Slapping
- 05 Other

OFFENSE LOCATION:
- 01 Classroom
- 02 Restroom
- 03 Hallway
- 04 Cafeteria
- 05 Locker room
- 06 Gym
- 07 Auditorium
- 08 Parking lot
- 09 Outside of the school building
- 10 Bus
- 11 Special event

WAS THIS OFFENSE GANG RELATED?
- 01 No
- 02 Yes

WAS A WEAPON INVOLVED?
- 01 No
- 02 Yes

DID AN INJURY OCCUR?
- 01 No
- 02 Yes

SPECIFY WEAPON:
- 31 Gun
- 32 Knife
- 33 Other sharp instrument
- 34 Blunt instrument
- 35 Projectile
- 36 Explosive
- 37 Brass knuckles
- 38 Martial arts instrument
- 39 Other

REQUIRED SERVICES:
- 01 No medical attention required
- 02 Attended to by school nurse
- 03 Attended to by other school personnel
- 04 Counseling provided
- 05 Hospital attention required
- 06 Death
- 07 Other

Appendix B

FLEMMING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REPORT

SCHOOL ID NUMBER 5454
STUDENT NUMBER: 1111
STUDENT NAME: JIM
DATE: 11/13/83
TIME: 12.23
TEACHER: GARY BERKO
GRADE: 6TH

OFFENSE #1: ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

This student was caught stealing. Further, JIM was caught loitering. Finally, the student was found to be in possession of a weapon.

This offense occurred in the locker room and was committed against an administrator. A blunt instrument was involved in the incident. Drug involvement is suspected, as an unspecified inhalent was found at the scene of the incident.

OFFENSE #2: FIGHTING BETWEEN STUDENTS

This student had a fight with another student in which hitting, punching, and/or kicking was involved. Further, JIM made verbal or gestural threats towards another student. Finally, the student verbally taunted another student.

This offense occured in the cafeteria/all purpose room. A knife was involved in the incident. An injury occurred, which was attended to in an unspecified manner.

OFFENSE #3: OTHER SCHOOL OFFENSES

This student was caught smoking. Further, JIM left the school grounds without permission. Finally, the student made excessive noise.

This offense occured in the cafeteria/all purpose room.

DIRECT ACTIONS TAKEN FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT:

No action was taken at the time.

SUGGESTED FUTURE ACTIONS:

No further action was recommended.

Appendix C

FLEMING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE REPORT

PERIOD COVERED: 00/00/00 TO 99/99/99

TOTAL INCIDENTS FOR PERIOD: 00/00/00 TO 99/99/99: 5

BREAKDOWN OF OFFENSES BY MAJOR CODE:

OFFENSE CODE	NUMBER OF OCCURANCES	% OF STUDENT'S TOTAL FOR PERIOD
1 DEFIANCE	3	30
2 DEFACING	1	10
3 ILLEGAL	2	20
4 ASSAULT	0	0
5 FIGHTING	1	10
6 INTERFERING	2	20
7 OTHER	1	10
TOTAL OFFENSES	10	100

BREAKDOWN OF ACTIONS BY DETAIL CODE:

IMMEDIATE ACTION: CODE	NUMBER	%	SUGGESTED ACTION: CODE	NUMBER	%
1 NONE	1	10	1 NONE	1	10
2 VERBAL	1	10	2 PARENT	3	30
3 WORK	1	10	3 IN DETEN	3	30
4 IN CLASS	1	10	4 IN SUSP	3	30
5 PRIVILEGE	2	20	5 OUT SUSP	0	0
6 PARENT	2	20	6 EXPULSION	0	0
7 ADMIN	2	20	7 CST	0	0
8 SCHL PERS	0	0	8 RETENTION	0	0
9 OTHER	0	0	9 TRANSFER	0	0
			10 OTHER	0	0